

Joseph Eugene Parks - Military History

(There is some duplication with the material written for the Goodwyn family history material concerning their family and WWII.)

Gene was inducted into the Marine Corps on May 8, 1944, and served in the Marine Corps for approximately 23 months. His discharge date was April 5, 1946, at Norfolk Naval Shipyards as Pvt. First Class.

His induction was in San Antonio, where he had his physical; he then went to San Diego for boot camp, had two weeks leave, went back to San Diego for Sea School, served at Treasure Island just out from the San Francisco Bay Bridge and at Mare Island Naval Shipyard near Vallejo, CA (NE of San Francisco) awaiting assignment. At Treasure Island he worked in the fleet post office from 4 to 12 p.m. and in his time off ran an elevator in a wholesale department store in San Francisco. He saved money diligently for the time he would return home. At Mare Island he supervised a prison detail. One day he was told he wasn't guarding the prisoners correctly. He questioned that they could say that when he had been issued a machine gun he hadn't been trained to use. He was immediately sent to the firing range for certification! While there they also certified him on a .45 mm pistol.

The Randolph was a new carrier that had been built and commissioned on the East coast. Gene was assigned to it as a striker who would maintain a quad 4 40mm anti-aircraft gun. His battle position was in the ammunition room. The action the Randolph saw is recounted in the book we have about the ship. The Marines on board (approximately 80) were part of the Gunnery Division, and Gene's picture is with them, Gunnery 7 Division There is a picture of the Quad 40 Gene took care of.

"The Randy" was active in the South Pacific; the planes from the carrier were very active in support of the Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The ship was also hit by the largest kamikaze of the war—a twin engine Frances bomber loaded with 500 lb. bombs. The repair ship Jason with its crew and the crew from the Randolph came alongside and in 19 days had the carrier back in action. It was the largest repair job ever completed west of Pearl Harbor. There were numerous other kamikazes but the ship's enormous firepower was able to knock them out before they hit it.

Another unfortunate incident happened when an American pilot flying a P-38 back to the States "buzzed" the carrier which was anchored in Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. He misjudged and hit the ship, taking his own plane and eleven others.. There was an ammunition ship alongside transferring bombs aboard the Randolph. If the fire had not been controlled the bombs would have exploded and both ships would have gone down. He was killed as were twelve sailors and the only Marine on the ship lost during the tour of duty.

Altogether one hundred four men from the ship were lost during WWII. The USS Randolph was extraordinarily fortunate. Admiral Mitscher at one time made it his flagship after two other ships serving in that capacity had been hit. One was a carrier 2000 yards off The Randolph that was sunk. The other was The Enterprise and it had been heavily damaged. Other carriers were sunk despite their escorts and all the ships themselves could do.

Having been very active in supplying the air power and fire power to wipe out the final vestiges of the air and naval power of Japan, the ship was one of the first to enter Japanese home waters after Japan's surrender. The Marines on the ship and others from the Pacific Fleet were pulled to be the historic initial occupation forces, going ashore following the surrender. Those on The Randolph were transferred while underway via boatswain's chair to The USS Ozark which had come alongside. They cruised off the coast for ten days, awaiting the word to "go in". Carrying full field equipment they disembarked into Higgins boats on the morning of August 30, and headed to Yokosuka Naval Air Station, seeing all around the damage inflicted by their bombers. These were seagoing Marines and not accustomed to land activity of this sort, so they had had some quick training.

Gene was assigned to accompany a Marine Captain Davis and search caves for soldiers who might be hiding, ammunition, whatever might be found. He brought back a few "souvenirs" from this adventure. One is a small wooden box with a leather handle. He had already sent it back to the ship when told they weren't to do this! They were each allowed to bring back a Japanese rifle and bayonet (which Gene disposed of several years ago). Having secured the area for the U.S., the detachment boarded the USS Monterrey on September 6 and headed to Okinawa and on to Pearl Harbor, arriving on October 20, 1945

Once again aboard The Randolph they sailed through the Panama Canal, having to remove the gunmounts in order to navigate the Canal due to the ship's width. Gene was a Captain's orderly and had shore privileges on both sides of the Canal with his Captain's jeep, no less! This assignment happened because he was the only Marine private on the ship who had certification on a .45 mm pistol! Gene had always gotten along with the other Marines, but those who had been a part of the initial crew were all "Yankees" and seemed to feel somewhat superior to him. This assignment with its privileges created a new situation!!

The Randolph continued up the East coast to Baltimore for Navy Day, the largest ship to ever enter that harbor. What a day!! Parades, bands, HOME!!! The ship went on to Norfolk Naval Yard. There Gene was sent to the Marine barracks at Portsmouth, VA. He was active at historic Monumental Methodist Church there and has maintained contact with the daughter of a woman from that church who befriended the fellows. He was assigned to the butcher shop there where they went to work early and were through by 10 a.m. He went out to the college there and took a course in public speaking. His Dad had contracted Bangs Disease/Malta Fever, a condition caused by drinking unpasteurized milk. Joe and Nora requested Gene's discharge as a hardship case as he was needed at home. This came at a time when the services were busy reducing their ranks. He would have otherwise have had two more years as it was a four year "hitch".

His friend Dwayne from Pharr took the offered three week leave after induction and before boot camp because his brother was coming home on leave from the Army. Dwayne was three weeks behind Gene, and when he finished boot camp there were no vacancies in the Sea School program—he was killed not long thereafter on Iwo Jima. This has bothered Gene all these years. He visited Dwayne's parents until their deaths. Dwayne's mother never got over Dwayne's death, and at one point went to San Diego and wandered the streets looking for him when the war was over and the Pacific Fleet came back. She couldn't accept his death. Dwayne and his parents are buried in the same cemetery as Joe and Nora Parks.

Gene's final comment about his time in service is always, "War is hell."